

Howard E. McCurdy, a former aide to then-Representative Slade Gorton, has graciously given us permission to reprint his account of the redistricting battles of the 1960s, *A Majority of the People: Factional Politics and Redistricting in Washington State* (1970).

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About the Author

Howard E. McCurdy, who holds a Ph.D. from Cornell University, is a professor of Public Administration at American University in Washington D.C. Born in California, he also attended the University of Washington, where he received both a Bachelor of Arts degree and an M.A. in public administration. While at the University of Washington, McCurdy served as an aide to then-Representative Slade Gorton during the redistricting battles of 1963 and 1965. A Majority of the People: A Case Study in the Redistricting of Washington State was originally written as his Master's thesis. His other scholarly works include several books on the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.



A young Howard McCurdy observes the legislative proceedings during the 1965 session.

A Majority of the People

A Case Study in the Redistricting of Washington State

by Howard E. McCurdy



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Republicans all voted for Evans, as was customary. The dissidents gained a seventh supporter on the second ballot, so Perry signaled for the Republican switch. The third ballot began immediately, and the well-guarded secret was revealed. Nevertheless, O'Brien and his lieutenants were so unprepared that they did not realize what was happening until they heard Evans—the eleventh Republican—vote for Day. Day took the rostrum with the support of nine Democrats and all but one of the 48 Republicans.

O'Brien, shocked and extremely bitter, tried to bring down the coalition with heavy floor attacks. The “regular” Democrats filibustered, trying to prevent adoption of the House rules that would have them share in the operation of the House. O'Brien refused to take just “some” committee chairmanships and insisted that his regular Democrats were the minority party. By the end of the first week the coalition had grown weary of these attacks. On Saturday, January 20, in 47 high-decibel seconds, the Republicans and dissidents cut off the filibuster, shouted through the new rules, and recessed the House. The coalition had survived the first test and was to endure.

The Bills are Drafted

Although Greive had not anticipated the coalition, he had expected divisions among the House Democrats and had built a strategy that required key votes from Republican representatives. The coalition did not change this strategy. On Wednesday, January 16, when Evans and Gorton ventured to his office, Greive outlined his bill and informed the two that he planned to pass it, or one like it, without reference to the Republican leadership.

The “new breed” had entered the coalition hoping to take an active role in redistricting, and had made Gorton chairman of the House redistricting committee so that he could lead them. The short meeting with Greive confirmed their plans to seize the initiative on redistricting. The “new breed” saw that Greive would never compromise and would use redistricting to strengthen his power in the Senate. They were adamantly opposed to protecting “Greive and his cronies,” for, along with O'Brien and Governor Rosellini, Greive epitomized all the “new Breed” wanted to overthrow in the Democratic party. It was virtually a matter of personality.

With their own bill, Republicans hoped to provide legislators with a major alternative to what Greive was proposing, win over Greive's opponents in the Senate, and form a new majority. It was easy for them, after the success of the coalition, to conjure up visions of overthrowing the Senate leadership, which would allow them to negotiate redistricting with the intellectual liberals in the Senate without reference to Greive.

The bill would also serve a second major purpose for the Republicans: it might become a guide for a court-drawn redistricting. In January nearly all legislators believed that the judges would redistrict if the legislators did not. This frightened Greive. But it almost pleased Gorton, for he thought that the court would surely draw a plan quite acceptable to the Republicans, perhaps along the lines of the LWV initiative. Gorton was little interested in negotiating with Greive until he became less adamant in his demands for a Democratic bill.

By the end of the first week of the session, each side was committed to a strategy for enacting its own redistricting bill—Greive by wooing away a few House Republicans, the “new breed” by dividing the Senate Democrats.

Two Opposing Bills

The two redistricting bills were even more opposing than the two strategies, simply because of the disparate manners in which the two men approached the redistricting task.

Greive's overriding interest in drawing his redistricting bill was the legislators who would vote for it. He was an expert in the interests in the districts of most legislators. To him redistricting was a job of piecing those interests together while insuring his supporters in and outside of the Senate the most favorable treatment. He was no umpire, but a powerful arbiter.

Gorton, on the other hand, insisted (at least initially) that the primary objective of his bill was achievement of the “one man, one vote” requirement. Greive agreed to this only to the extent necessary to satisfy the court. Furthermore, Greive had a somewhat unique interpretation of what the court might require. Whereas Gorton and most other legislators figured Senate representation separately from that of the House, Greive lumped both together. Everyone believed that the court